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ABSTRACT

Wisconsin writer Marshal Cook's article, "Training Your Muse: Seven Steps to Creativity," (1986) provides a basis for creative activities which help students in a three-credit tutor training course understand both tutoring and the writing process. In the first activity student tutors are asked to bring in a picture that symbolizes a good tutoring quality or characteristic (e.g., patience, kindness, intelligence, etc.) and the group tries to guess what the quality is. In the next activity this idea is expanded to a "special project" where students are asked to create a "show piece" that defines what tutoring is, for example a collage, picture, or album which includes quotes from their reading. When the special project is due, students may present it to the rest of the class. A third activity is designed to tap into the student's creativity by requiring each student to draw a picture of the writing process. The three activities help students learn about tutoring and its relationship to the writing process, by bringing up a number of different topics for discussion and allowing tutors to talk about writing as well as tutoring. (Guidelines for the special project assignment are attached.) (NH)

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Using Art in Training Tutors

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Using Art in Training Tutors

Wisconsin writer Marshal Cook wrote in The Writer's Digest (1986) that "An idea strikes like summer lightning." (p. 26) He also notes that "You can create a literary lightning rod to draw inspiration to you when you need it." He discusses how writers can discipline and give direction to their "muse." He outlines seven steps to harnessing creativity. He describes a writing process. For years, I have used his article as part of a three credit tutor training course. This article inspired me to focus on creative ways to explore the writing process with tutors. His vivid descriptions create an exciting picture of the writing process. My course objective is to help students understand both the tutoring and writing process. I have designed several assignments where students are asked to draw a picture to explain, for example, the characteristics of good tutoring. I later added a special project where students are asked to create a "show piece" to highlight the tutoring process. I have recently added one more assignment where students are asked to draw something that explains the writing process. Each of these assignments will be discussed and described.

First of all, I do appreciate art. I also believe that creating art is liberating. Since I want to create a bond with each tutor, and have used similar assignments in other classes with success, I decided to try the technique with tutors. My purpose is for them to harness their creativity with their tutees. I found that having the students bring something in to share and discuss makes the class go quickly. When I asked each tutor to bring in a picture that symbolizes a good tutoring quality or characteristic, the group tries to guess what the quality is. Obviously, we get pictures dealing with patience, kindness, juggling, intelligence to name a few. Some of the pictures are hand drawn. Others may include a picture cut from a magazine. Everyone participates. It becomes like a guessing game. Every contribution is valued. I enjoy the class even more. I would often keep the pictures to share with future classes. I later discovered that some of the pictures fit well when I wanted to present a particular concept. Thus, the pictures have enriched the course. Since this activity seemed to work so well, I made it a permanent part of the course and expanded the technique. I call this the "Special Project."

I ask the students to create something (for their special project) that defines what tutoring is. The assignment specifically asks students to create a collage, a picture, or album. I ask them to include quotes from their reading. The project is to be creative, artistic, and informative. When the project is due, since the class is usually small each student presents the project to the rest of the class and explains the main purpose or how the project relates to tutoring writing. Each student is applauded for his or her efforts. I am now in

the habit of keeping the projects. Some are on display in the writing lab. Others are used as examples when I want to teach a particular concept. One of the projects, I use as an advertisement for the writing lab. One project dealt with the ABC's of tutoring naming a quality for every letter of the alphabet. Another discussed the steps of tutoring. There are of course steps with words printed on them. One student drew a picture showing the road to successful tutoring. The creativity has been a pleasant surprise. I have come to rely on these projects in that they have become useful teaching tools. Colleagues have noted and praised the art work. My office partner encouraged me to have the projects posted for all to see.

I recently began to ask my students to draw a picture of the writing process. I did not care what was drawn just so it showed one or more aspects of the writing process. I wanted to use the pictures for discussion. I also decided to post each one on the bulletin board in the classroom. The drawings were quite fascinating. There were pictures of the many different parts of the writing process: what was needed to be creative and successful, what not to do, and a comparison of the writing process to planting flowers. Some were elaborate. Some were not so elaborate. The whole purpose was to tap into the student's creativity. I wanted to have something that I could hang for all to see and appreciate. In such a way I have discovered a way to create a classroom environment where students will feel free to share and participate in classroom activities. I did not expect so many positive results. I suppose a picture is worth one thousand words as well as a number of pleasant experiences. I believe that I have learned quite a bit from the process. At first some students may be reluctant because they insist that they have no artistic talent. However, what is important is that a point or idea is conveyed. Since tutors are generally very capable students, they are able to do the assignment successfully. After each has completed the task and shared his or her creation, I sense that each feels relieved but proud.

Cook's article, "Training Your Muse: Seven Steps to Creativity," shows students how to harness their creativity for writing. His article talks about nurturing ideas. He also discusses mental activities that will help the writer along his or her path to a final product. He notes that "Creative people must entertain lots of silly ideas in order to receive the occasional strokes of genius." (p. 28) I can not say that an art project in a tutoring class is a silly idea or a stroke of genius. I can say that it works. I believe that the three different projects discussed above help students learn a lot about tutoring and its relationship to the writing process. It also brings out a number of different topics for discussion. It also allows tutors to talk about writing as well as tutoring. I believe that is as good a rationale as any for incorporating such activities in the classroom. What makes

it so appealing is that it is so simple and easy to do. The conversation that results has always been worth the effort. Thus we share, we talk, we learn, we create. The harness works splendidly in capturing so much creativity.

Here are some comments on one of the assignments. These students were asked to comment on what they learned from drawing a picture of the writing process:

> I learned what is involved in each stage of the process.
>
> I learned exactly what I did in order to write a good paper. I never quite realized what I did. It helped me analyze my process.
>
> I learned that the writing process is a creative process that comes from the center of each person just as art. It is another way of sharing the deep truth within us with each other.
>
> From my own creation, I learned that the writing process takes considerable thought, and there is a "process." I learned more about the process from the other students' pictures and their processes. A wonderful collaborative experience!

It is obvious from these comments that those who reflected deeply on the writing process as it relates to tutoring writing gained a lot. The last comment sums up well what I want to share with colleagues. From the above classroom activities, I too learned a lot about what I can expect from students. I also found a way to have some fun in the classroom. Not all students understand the purpose of the exercises, but many do see the connection. The writing process and the process of tutoring require creativity and the ability to dream. Ideas come from the mind only to become real through the spoken or printed word. I want tutors to appreciate how powerful that is.

Source cited: Marshal Cook in Writer's Digest (1986). "Training Your Muse: Seven Steps to Harnessing Your Creativity." pp. 27-30

Special Project English for Tutors

I would like for you to do something creative for your special project. I would like for it to demonstrate what you have learned for the semester. The special project should be something exciting that will define what tutoring is or should be for you. Please take this project seriously and do your best work.

Directions: I would like for you to create a collage or picture or album that defines or describes what a good tutor is. You may paste pictures from magazines or you may draw your own. Do create a title. If you have an album confine it to 5 pages. You may include quotes, your experiences (in pictures), anything that would relate to tutoring and instruction. You may even have quotes from greatful students. Be artistic. Make certain that the project teaches something. I would also like you to include a paragraph or so explaining your project. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. If time permits, I would like to show them to members of the class and perhaps have you explain your project. It will be part of the course grade. You may also want to describe the characteristics of a good tutor. You might want to focus on ways to help tutees.